

Motivating Heritage Language Learning Through Bilingual Video Letters: Seeking Changes in Heritage Language Learning Environments for Vietnamese Children

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Summary

How can we motivate CLD children¹ to learn their heritage language²? In the current paper, the author clarifies the difficulties and possibilities of learning the heritage language in the Japanese school environment through the practice of the "bilingual video letter" teaching method, which was conducted in search of a way to achieve this goal.

Key Words

Heritage Language, CLD Children, Identity Texts, Learning Environments

I. Introduction

In Japan today, there are many difficulties with learning the heritage languages spoken in the homes of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) children. One of the reasons for this is that educational and societal spaces in Japan treat the experience of growing up in a plurilingual environment negatively rather than positively. In order to turn multilingual and multicultural environments into a positive factor in children's development, rather than a negative one, changes are needed in the current classroom culture at schools with such children and in the educational environments that surround them.

This paper introduces a case study of using bilingual video letters to motivate CLD children to learn their

1 In this paper, children with connections to other countries and brought up in multilingual cultural environments are referred to as CLD children or students. Specifically, these children are first-, second-, third-, or even fourth-generation immigrants, raised by parents who both relocated to Japan from another country.

2 The home language of CLD children is called their first language (L1) or heritage language. The L1 is defined as "the language that is learned first and can be used even now" (Nakajima 1998: 20). When children reach school age and the second language (L2) used in their studies becomes dominant, the native language is relativized and shifts status into being the their "parents' language"—that is, the heritage language. This paper develops its argument while using "heritage language" as a general term to mean the L1 and the home language of CLD children/students.

heritage (or first) languages. Though these video letters were originally introduced as a means of supporting heritage language learning (also known as heritage language acquisition) among CLD children (here, first- or second-generation Vietnamese children in Japan), the paper describes and considers the impact on the ethnically Vietnamese children observed during the implementation of the teaching method, as well as on their guardians, educators, and others in the local community.

1-1. Background to the Study: The Importance and Difficulties of Heritage Language Learning

The importance of heritage language education for young learners who are CLD children brought up in environments with more than one language, and where the language spoken in the home of the CLD children (hereafter, “the heritage language”) differs from the second language (that is, the dominant language; in Japan, Japanese) used in schools, nurseries, and other places of education, has received much discussion by Cummins (1981) and others.

Regarding the importance of heritage language learning, Notsu (2010) cites the following three arguments.

(1) For learning curricula and improving Japanese language proficiency

As represented by the linguistic interdependence hypothesis (Cummins and Swain, 1986), which asserts that L1 (heritage/first language) and L2 (the learning/second language) form interdependently, heritage language education is important for acquiring L2 and, accordingly, for general learning of curricula.

(2) For shaping identity

Heritage language learning increases self-esteem and helps establish emotional stability and identity. As such, heritage language learning is considered important. Studies by the likes of Ishii (1999), Sekiguchi (2003), and Takahashi (2009) have argued from this position.

(3) As a means of communicating with family

The issues of psychological instability and communication breakdowns between parents who speak only the heritage language and the second or third generations, among whom the L2 is dominant, are frequently described. The importance of heritage language learning has been noted for resolving these parent-child communication problems (Kitayama 2012; Takahashi 2009).

In addition, Notsu (2010) presents the following three arguments for the importance of heritage language learning that should be discussed further.

(4) Heritage language as a human right

A heritage language has been asserted as a human right since the 1970s in Europe. It is claimed that language should be regarded as a human right and that heritage language learning should be maintained and developed from the perspective of safeguarding human rights (Kymlicka 1998).

(5) Heritage language as a socioeconomic resource

Heritage languages are cited as a resource with economic value, linking the necessity of heritage language learning with more realistic socioeconomic lifestyles. This argument asserts that learning and using a heritage language is a resource for an individual and social economic activities (Cummins & Danesi 2005, Matsuda 2009).

(6) Heritage language as a means of traveling to and from home country

It has been claimed (Kuwahara 2001) that learning the heritage language in Japan in order to facilitate finding employment after returning to their country of origin is highly important to offset future risks.

The importance and necessity of heritage-language education has been argued in these ways. However, in Japan today, there is a tendency to prioritize education in Japanese over the heritage language, with preschools and elementary school teachers telling CLD households not to use the heritage language at home and rather to use only Japanese in their lives. As Matsuda (2017) has indicated, CLD children may lose the opportunity to learn the heritage language and which may result in a negative impact on their Japanese-language development.

Language is also a factor in children and young learners becoming aware of and establishing their identity. Children who perceive that their heritage language is not recognized by society feel that their heritage language is not something useful and, as Matsuda (2017) says, often have negative feelings about their own roots and identity, and which can negatively impact their learning.

Many difficulties exist for CLD children's heritage language learning, which is undertaken amid the aforementioned social and educational environment. One difficulty lies in maintaining the motivation to learn (Nakajima 2003). In classes for learning heritage languages, researchers (Kitayama 2012, Ochiai 2012) have regularly observed and reported that children who had enjoyed their time at elementary school through the lower grades will, once they enter the higher grades, begin to question why they must learn the heritage language. Entering junior high school, they attend heritage language classes less frequently for various reasons, including the increasing level of the curriculum, club activities, and growing pressure to assimilate with their peers. But there are also examples of children reappraising heritage language learning when later considering the path from the second half of junior high to high school, whereby certain children reassess that they are fortunate to have peers to learn with (Nakajima 2003) and others that the heritage language is something positive that broadens their chances in life (Matsuda & Nakayama 2010).

In order to maintain motivation in heritage language learning for children from the upper grades of elementary school through junior high school, various factors and approaches are required, including learning environments where children can learn with their friends and teaching methods that stimulate children's interest.

This paper describes and demonstrates the significance of classes that used exchanging bilingual video letters as a teaching method aiming to maintain motivation for heritage language learning, mainly targeting children in the upper grades of elementary school and above.

1-2. Overview of the Field

This paper is based on observations and surveys conducted at classes for Vietnamese heritage language learning in School A, a public elementary school in Hyogo Prefecture. School A has approximately two hundred students in total and with mostly one class per grade, a comparatively small school. In this school, around twenty³ Vietnamese children participate in Vietnamese heritage language studies. There are also several students with roots in the Korean Peninsula.

The Vietnamese children at School A are first-generation immigrants or second-generation immigrants whose parents migrated to Japan. They are raised in multilingual environments whereby their homes are Vietnamese-speaking and they use Japanese at school. The children's Vietnamese-language ability varies greatly. There are children who have recently migrated from Vietnam and are receiving support to help them with their

³ In fiscal 2023, seventeen Vietnamese children participated in Vietnamese language studies, while twenty-one children participated in fiscal 2014, when the initiative outlined in this paper was implemented.

Japanese, and there are some who are receiving Vietnamese-language education at home from their guardians and so possess both the ability to speak as well as to read and write in Vietnamese, but many of the children have listening comprehension in Vietnamese but poor speaking ability, and some encounter reading and writing for the first time in the school's Vietnamese language classes.

These classes started at School A in 2006 as a Hyogo Prefecture initiative, comprising one class (forty-minutes of teaching and a fifteen-minute break) each for the lower-grade students and upper-grade students, held once a week after regular classes. After this prefectural program ended in 2010, it continued as a Kobe City initiative repositioning the classes as heritage language learning for building Japanese-language ability. Over the fourteen years of the program, the Vietnamese language instructors have been Japanese teachers with experience of studying in Vietnam, and who hold positions teaching Vietnamese at classes organized by local Vietnamese community groups or at elementary and junior high schools in other prefectures. In the Vietnamese classes, the Vietnamese language instructor is supported by School A's teacher in charge of CLD education as well as several homeroom teachers.

Since 2006, this author has observed activities at these classes during special events and, for five years between 2011 and 2015, while working as a teaching assistant at School A and, from 2016, while working in a support capacity for students as a coordinator at a local university, attended and observed classes in the Vietnamese language program, documented these observations, and conducted regular interviews with children in the upper grades.

The children became familiar with the songs and stories in Vietnamese that appeared in the curriculum over the year, learned the Vietnamese alphabet and pronunciation, retained vocabulary through flashcards, enjoyed various seasonal events like the mid-autumn festival and *Tết* (New Year), learned the Vietnamese lion dance (*múa lân*), and presented the Vietnamese language and culture they had learned to all students at the school.

1-3. Previous Research on Motivating Heritage Language Learning

At the Vietnamese language studies program at School A, through the teaching methods and classroom "tips"⁴ of the Vietnamese language instructor and CLD education teacher, the children have generally enjoyed their time attending these after-school Vietnamese classes, but from around the fourth grade of elementary school, some children begin to question the meaning of coming to the Vietnamese classes, or refuse to come. Why does this demotivation for learning Vietnamese occur as the children grow older? The following sets out the previous research on this subject.

Regarding the difficulty in maintaining motivation in heritage language learning, several factors have been identified. Nakajima (2003) notes that, firstly, when there is large social disparity between the dominant language and heritage language, the heritage language learner internalizes the negative valorization of the heritage language by society, and, secondly, that heritage language learning is regarded as "the parents' choice," and becomes a passive form of learning for the children. As Nakajima explains, children's motivation to learn the heritage language lowers during the transition from the lower to upper grades, the enthusiasm of the parents that worked positively on the students in the lower grades being felt, in the upper grades, as pressure that negatively

4 For more on these "tips" in relation to everyday teaching methods in the Vietnamese language studies program at School A, see Ochiai (2012).

impacts the students.

Based on her account of the positive attitude toward heritage language learning among elementary school lower-grade participants at heritage language classes where she worked as a heritage language instructor, and which then, by contrast, this attitude became negative among the upper-grade students, Kitayama (2012) also explains the shift as rooted in how elementary school children begin developing their own personalities at this point, the fourth grade that is a stage in their development when they change greatly, and they start to criticize adults harshly.

Why is the enthusiasm of the parents for heritage language learning felt as pressure by the children when they enter the upper grades of elementary school? Why does developing a personality and criticism of adults lead to a negative attitude toward the heritage language? To consider these questions, we should examine the previous research on language learning motivation.

According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), motivation in learning a language is deeply related to having a favorable attitude toward speakers of the language and a feeling of wanting to become one of them. That favorable attitude toward speakers of the language and wanting to become one of them is tied to a motivation to learn. Gardner and Lambert identify what they call integrative orientation, which improves language ability, and which is contrasted with instrumental orientation, such as for the purposes of gaining employment or proceeding to a higher level of education (Yashima 2004).

Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) propose the concept of ethnolinguistic vitality, defined by the social status of the language, the social distribution of the speakers, and the systematic support received. Yashima writes that “languages with strong ethnolinguistic vitality have a high practical value and make motivation to learn them more likely to occur” (2004: 64).

Young heritage language learners in Japan, in particular when that language is a minority language in society, want to feel part of their family. That is, the heritage language speakers whom the children first aspire to integrate with are surely the members of their family. Until the lower grades of elementary school, the family is an incredibly important social environment for children. Within the restricted social environment that is the family, the heritage language has a strong sense of ethnolinguistic vitality, and children look to heritage language learning out of a high motivation to learn so that they can feel part of the family. But when children transition from the lower to upper grades of elementary school, the most important social environment for children expands out from their family to include their friends and school class. With this expansion of their social environment, the goal of integration ceases to be only the family that speaks the heritage language, and shifts to friends in the same class or the school society that uses Japanese. The ethnolinguistic vitality of the heritage language becomes relatively weaker, replaced by the ethnolinguistic vitality of Japanese, which grows stronger with the expansion of children’s social environments.

At this point, if good relationships can be built with the heritage language instructor and the friends learning the same language in the heritage language classes, then children would, albeit haltingly, be able to overcome this period by valuing the interpersonal relationships within that classroom. But, as was observed, when the desire to identify and belong with the friends from regular classes wins out over the heritage language classes, which take place after school and with comparatively few people, then enthusiasm for learning the heritage language diminishes.

What can be done to make these children better aware of the heritage language-speaking community? The following section examines the attempt to build a community of Vietnamese speakers through the program undertaken at School A to create, screen, and exchange Japanese-Vietnamese bilingual video letters.

II. Bilingual Video Letter Exchange Program

The Japanese-Vietnamese bilingual video letters initiative aimed to make and exchange video letters produced bilingually in Vietnamese and Japanese for Vietnamese-speaking friends. The bilingual video letters were made over a four-year period from the 2014 to 2018 academic years. The exchange partners were, at different times in the program, students at a public elementary school in Vietnam, students at a Japanese language school for Vietnamese returnees with experience of living in Japan, and Japanese students at a vocational school learning Vietnamese. This paper focuses on the exchange with the students at a public elementary school in Vietnam in 2014, and describes those activities and the insights obtained from it.

2-1. Preparing by Making Identity Texts

The conceptual basis for the bilingual video letter initiative was the “identity text” teaching method (Cummins & Early 2011). This is a bilingual learning practice employed in Canada, where several languages coexist societally, as a means for children in multilingual environments to express themselves in two languages (the L1 and L2). Friends, including those whose proficiency in the heritage language is high and those with a high proficiency in the L2, work together to make texts, which are then shown to their teachers and classmates, and even sometimes to relatives in their native countries through the internet. This activity improves their proficiency in the two languages and also helps them obtain the ability to express themselves through working with others. By also receiving help during the learning process from their families or members of the community—people with high proficiencies in the heritage language—they also strengthen their bonds with those people. Presenting their finished work makes their bilingualism visible to those around them and gives the child confidence, and also provides the opportunity to learn about the children’s thoughts on their heritage culture and their heritage-language abilities, which are not usually visible to the adults and children around them. As a result, the people around them are given the chance to acquire an awareness of other cultures and international understanding as well as relativize their own culture (Ochiai & Matsuda 2014).

In the Vietnamese classes at School A, an identity text project was started in the third semester of 2013 with the name of “My Pride—What Makes Me Proud About Vietnam?” The children began by making pictures based on the experiences related to Vietnam of which they are proud (for example, the food they ate with their family, memories of going to the sea, or a swimming pool in Vietnam) and they then wrote a text in Japanese explaining the pictures. With the help of the Vietnamese language teacher, they subsequently rewrote the Japanese text into Vietnamese, and put everything into a PowerPoint presentation. The completed pieces were shown at the Multicultural Children’s Festival, which was held locally by a nonprofit organization in March that year as an event for children with Korean and Vietnamese roots to present their cultures. All of the pieces were shown and, under the supervision of their parents, teachers from School A, and people from the community, three children agreed to read out their Vietnamese and Japanese texts from the PowerPoint presentations.

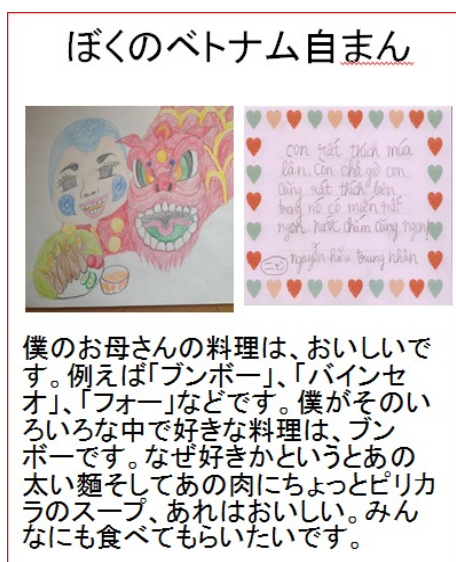


Figure 1 An example of an identity text made in 2013.

In these activities, children could express themselves through art and in Japanese and Vietnamese, all while watched over by the relevant people, and, in particular, their usually hidden Vietnamese-language abilities were made visible. It was observed that the children gained confidence when they were praised and this improved understanding among the people around them.

And it also led to the project in the following academic year that took things one step further by having students make and present bilingual video letters.

2-2. Making the Bilingual Video Letters

The bilingual video letters in the 2014 academic year were made in the first half of the second semester and in the third semester. The participants in the project were eighteen students from the third to the six grades.

The video letters were made according to the following process.

- (1) Clarifying the partners for the video letter exchange
- (2) Writing letters in Japanese
- (3) Translating the letters into Vietnamese
- (4) Taking photographs appropriate to the letter content
- (5) Practice reading out the Japanese-Vietnamese bilingual letters
- (6) Filming and editing the video letters
- (7) Exchanging the video letters
- (8) Screening the video letters

Each stage of the process is described below.

- (1) Clarifying the partners for the video letter exchange

In 2014, students at School F, which is located in the UNESCO World Heritage Site *Hà Long Bay*, were

asked to be partners in the exchange program. The Vietnamese language teacher at School A, Instructor K, had previously made frequent visits to this elementary school. During these trips, Instructor K had filmed videos of *Hà Long Bay*, School F, and the lives of the students. The process of making the video letters began by first showing these videos to the students attending the Vietnamese classes at School A, and clarifying to the students who would be receiving their video letters.

The children were then encouraged to think about the content of their video letter: “We will make a video letter in Japanese and Vietnamese for the children at School F, telling them the things about your home that you are proud of. The children at School F are probably proud of *Hà Long Bay*. What are we proud of? Let’s think of some ideas.”

(2) Writing letters in Japanese

With the main theme of the letter set as aspects about the children’s town and lives that they are proud of, the students were divided into three groups of between five and seven each.

The children discussed the things about their town and their lives that they like and came up with various ideas in their respective groups: Japan’s four seasons, especially the cold winter; the Japanese pancake dish *okonomiyaki*, which is similar to the Vietnamese food *bánh xèo*; the expressways that were destroyed in the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995 but then rebuilt; and their schoolyard, which has lots of playground equipment. Three more themes were decided for the content: my town, my school, and my culture.

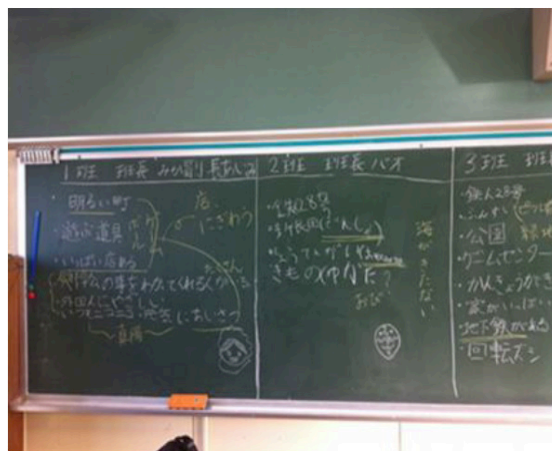


Figure 2 Grouping the ideas of the students using affinity diagrams (the KJ Method).

After this, each student chose the key aspect from the three themes that they most wanted to convey to the children at School F, and then wrote his or her own Japanese text based on that.

(3) Translating the letters into Vietnamese

These Japanese texts written by the students were translated into Vietnamese under the main guidance of the Vietnamese language instructor. Though it was initially anticipated that the students could receive support in doing their translations from their guardians at home, the nature of the task required the person helping to have fluency in both languages, and so ultimately proved difficult. By coincidence, four researchers in Vietnamese language from another university were then visiting to observe the Vietnamese classes at School A, and they

were asked to help. They worked one-on-one with the students to translate the letters.

(4) Taking photographs appropriate to the letter content

In the video letters, it was decided to introduce the local area and school with photographs. After the texts in the two languages were almost complete, the students used their time during the Vietnamese classes to take the photographs. These were taken at a wide range of locations, from a convenience store to a Vietnamese food shop, an expressway destroyed in the Great Hanshin Earthquake and then later rebuilt, the school playground and library, and a temple for Vietnamese residents. The homeroom teachers who helped in the classes remarked that it was their first time to visit a Vietnamese temple and that taking the photographs was also good fieldwork for them.

(5) Practice reading out the Japanese-Vietnamese bilingual letters

The bilingual video letters feature footage of the children reading out the texts they wrote in both languages. The children worked hard practicing to read out the Vietnamese text. Several guardians fluent in Vietnamese gave pointers to the children about their pronunciation. Fifth Grader E, who until then had not been very enthusiastic about learning Vietnamese, received help from their mother and eagerly practiced reading out their Vietnamese letter. Student N, whose Vietnamese was the strongest among the sixth graders and who was also literate, not only worked on their own text but also gave help to the other sixth graders with their pronunciation, and during the lunchbreak Student N and the Instructor K coached the six sixth graders.

(6) Filming and editing the video letters

The filming was done over two weeks. For the filming and editing, iPad devices was used with the cooperation of the Graduate School of Informatics at Kansai University. Using iPads meant that anyone could operate the equipment, and the videos could be reshot as many times as necessary. Five iPad devices in total were given to the students to record their letters, and the children were free to use them while practicing, and took turns to film each other during the recordings.



Figure 3 The children filmed the video letters while offering each other encouragement.

(7) Exchanging the video letters

The filmed letters were edited into three polished videos—“My Town,” “My School,” and “My Culture”—by Student T at the Graduate School of Informatics at Kansai University. Each video was between five and ten minutes long with music, and featured the children reading out their texts, accompanied by relevant photographs.

They were uploaded to a video streaming website as private videos and links for viewing the videos were sent to the exchange partners at School F. At roughly the same time, School F emailed its video letter comprising a slideshow of images from a day during the *Tết* holiday.

(8) Screening the video letters

In the second half of March, the video exchange with School F was shown at three screening events—one for the guardians of Vietnamese children at School A, one for students in the Vietnamese language program at School A, and another for the local nonprofit organization—and in this way the results were shared with Vietnamese guardians, homeroom teachers, and peers from the Vietnamese classes, and people in the local community.



Figure 4 Homeroom teachers watching the bilingual video letters shown at the screening for the guardians of Vietnamese children

III. Analysis

In the students’ studies from making to screening the video letters, the changes were observed in the following aspects: the effectiveness of using iPads, inter-student collaboration, student-guardian collaboration, and deepened understanding of other teachers at School A. These are discussed below.

3-1. Effectiveness of Using iPads

During the recording of the video letters, five iPad devices were given to the students for filming each other’s final readings and the run-throughs they did while waiting. Analyzing the video footage that was left, it is clear that the students practiced in front of the camera over and over again, at times laughing and embarrassed, or even tearful because they could not get the results they wanted in the final recording, and that they maintained concentration in their Vietnamese studies.

The videos capture moments when the students directly speak in Vietnamese. For the students, they could experience looking objectively at the opportunity to use Vietnamese, which is something that does not usually happen in their everyday lives. Filming a video letter that makes their Vietnamese abilities visible, many of the children were somewhat nervous and worked hard to practice ahead of the final recordings. Using iPad devices seemed to lead to a Vietnamese-learning environment that encouraged students to concentrate and be nervous about doing well.

3-2. Inter-Student Collaboration

The children looked out for their friends, who were nervous about speaking Vietnamese and frustrated, or even tearful, when they could not do it like they had practiced, and they offered each other encouragement during the filming. In an interview with the sixth grader Student N, it was evident that the student coached the other six graders when practicing to read out their letters, here experiencing what it is like to help others and improving their own self-efficacy

The process of making the video letters fostered collaborative relationships among the children for improving their Vietnamese-language abilities during the classes.

3-3. Student-Guardian Collaboration

While it was difficult to involve the guardians of the Vietnamese children in the translation of the Japanese texts into Vietnamese, they played a major role when the students were practicing to read out their Vietnamese texts before the recording. Several of the students were coached at home by their guardians for this. In particular, the fifth-grader Student E explained in a later interview that practicing Vietnamese with their mother when rehearsing before the filming made them feel glad that they were Vietnamese and that they had studied Vietnamese.

Subsequently moving into the sixth grade, Student E was given the joint responsibility with their twin sister M of making announcements in Vietnamese to guardians at a music concert, graduation ceremony, and other occasions. For this, they received coaching from their mother and, under the supervision of their classmates, teachers, and people in the community, worked to improve their Vietnamese and had these opportunities to present their achievements.

In addition to the screening for the guardians of the Vietnamese students, the screening for the local nonprofit was also attended by two sets of children and parents, including E, M, and their mother, who watched over the children talking in Vietnamese.

According to the results of a questionnaire conducted with the children after they had filmed the video letters, 55 percent (ten children) said that they wanted to show the video letters to the children at School F, while 27 percent (five children) said that they wanted to show it to their parents and relatives (grandparents, cousins) living in Vietnam. For the children, speaking Vietnamese was both a way to build a new Vietnamese-speaking community with the video letter exchange partners (the children at School F), and also an opportunity to recognize again the Vietnamese-speaking community they already have in the form of their parents in Japan and their families living in Vietnam.

3-4. Deepened Understanding of Teachers at School A

When the students went off-campus to take photographs for the video letters, homeroom teachers at the school not usually involved in the program were asked to help, and they accompanied the children to the Vietnamese temple and food shop. For most of the homeroom teachers, the occasion became fieldwork about the local Vietnamese community.

The event with the guardians of Vietnamese children was also attended by homeroom teachers for the participating children as well as the school principal and vice-principal. They watched the video letters together with the guardians, making it an opportunity for them to learn concretely about the children's Vietnamese abilities. For the teachers who had only until then had the chance to see the children express themselves in Japanese, the video letters initiative put the dual linguistic of the children on display and allowed them to develop a deeper understanding of their students.

IV. Conclusion

The four changes in the learning environments observed during the process of making and showing the bilingual video letters led to higher motivation among students to learn the heritage language. This took place in the following two ways: increased awareness of the Vietnamese-speaking community, and making the Vietnamese-language abilities of the children visible.

4-1. Increased Awareness of the Vietnamese-Speaking Community

Work on making bilingual videos initially proceeded with the similarly aged children at School F in Vietnam in mind. Though the children did become aware of the community they shared with the students at School F as the exchange project developed, this consciousness is not particularly strong at present. Instead, the children in the Vietnamese classes were helped and encouraged in their Vietnamese studies by their peers, and they also received support in their studies from their guardians, and the Vietnamese-speaking community that had already existed around them was activated. In this regard, the children were motivated to learn the heritage language with an integrative orientation (Gardner & Lambert 1972) toward that Vietnamese-language community.

4-2. Making the Vietnamese-Language Abilities of the Children Visible

By filming the video letters with iPad devices and then showing them at the events, the children's Vietnamese-language abilities were made visible both within the Vietnamese classroom and to their guardians and teachers. Having experienced what it is like to receive praise from those around them for their improved Vietnamese abilities, the children were motivated to learn the heritage language with an instrumental orientation (Gardner & Lambert 1972), in that they wanted to become able to speak Vietnamese well.

4-3. Future Challenges

As described above, this initiative to make and screen bilingual video letters was an effective teaching method that made the Vietnamese-language abilities of the participating children visible, activated the

Vietnamese-speaking community around them, and motivated children to learn the heritage language.

The program did not achieve the expected results in terms of the exchange with the initial project partner, School F. One major reason for this was that the latter was a public school, which meant that proceeding further with the exchange project required approval from the school's regional education authority. In the 2015 academic year, the exchange partner was a privately run cram school in Hanoi for returnee Vietnamese students who, having come back to Vietnam, wish to maintain their Japanese abilities. From the 2016 academic year, bilingual video letters were exchanged with students learning Vietnamese at a vocational school in Osaka.

In the future, this researcher would like to continue investigating the potential for bilingual video letters as a teaching method that can motivate heritage language learning with an integrative orientation newly acquired from the ongoing exchange program.

Acknowledgments: This research was supported by Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research(C)(19K00738).

Note: An earlier version of this article entitled, “Dai yon syou: Bilingual video letter ni yoru” kyoujyuhou to bogogakusyu nodoukiduke” Chapter four: Bilingual Video Letter Teaching Methods and Motivating Mother Tongue Learning In *Tabunka jidō no mirai o hiraku—Kokunaigai no bogo kyōiku shien no genba kara* [Opening the Future of Multicultural Children: From the Frontline of Native Language Education in and out of Japan], Matsuda Yōko, Notsu Takashi, and Ochiai Tomoko (eds.). Tokyo: Kyōiku Kenkyū Shuppan [in Japanese]. This version has been substantially revised.

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